

Sūrah Falaq

Subject Matter and Relationship with the Previous Sūrah

In the introduction to Sūrah Ikhlāṣ, the previous *sūrah*, we had explained that the belief of monotheism is the foundation of Islam. For this reason, the Almighty began His Book with a mention of this belief and ended it on it too. It is as if Sūrah Ikhlāṣ is the last *sūrah* of the Qur’ān. The last two *sūrahs* which come after it – the *mu’awwadhatayn* – are like two sentinels guarding this treasure of monotheism. In these two *sūrahs*, people have been asked to seek refuge with God from all evils which in any way can distract and divert them from monotheism.

This elaborate arrangement for monotheism is because, as referred to before, it is the foundation of religion. If a person is fully grounded in the belief of monotheism, it is as if he is fully grounded in religion. If temporarily he does get distracted from any directive of religion, it is hoped that because he is fully attached to its foundation he will be guided by God’s grace to the right path. On the contrary, if he is led astray in any way regarding the belief of monotheism, there is a strong chance that he will keep getting further away from religion and a time may come that he may reach a point of no return.

The second reason for this elaborate arrangement is that in order to achieve success in the test in which a person is put through in this world, it is essential that he fight Satan till his death and defeat him. It is on this victory over Satan that his success in the Hereafter hinges. The special area in which Satan has sworn to defeat mankind is monotheism. He has challenged the Almighty that He will lie in ambush for man on the path of monotheism and will try to divert him from this path and put him on the path of polytheism. The Qur’ān mentions his challenge in the following words:

قَالَ فِيمَا أُغْوِيْتَنِي لِأَفْعِدَنَّ لَهُمْ صِرَاطَكَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ثُمَّ لَا تَنِيَّهُمْ مِّن بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ وَعَنْ أَيْمَانِهِمْ وَعَنْ شَمَائِلِهِمْ وَلَا تَجِدُ أَكْثَرَهُمْ شَاكِرِينَ (٧: ١٦-١٧)

Satan said: “Because You have led me astray I shall sit in ambush for these [children of Adam] on Your straight path [of monotheism]. Then I shall launch an onslaught on them from their front and from their rear and from their right and from their left. Then You will find a greater part of them ungrateful [deviants from monotheism].” (7:16-17)

The details of the evil scheme devised by Satan to lure man to polytheism are mentioned in his own words in Sūrah Nisā' thus:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا بَعِيدًا إِنَّ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ إِلَّا إِنَاثًا وَإِنْ يَدْعُونَ إِلَّا شَيْطَانًا مَرِيدًا لَعَنَهُ اللَّهُ وَقَالَ لَا تُخَدِّنْ مِنْ عِبَادِكَ نَصِيبًا مَفْرُوضًا وَلَا ضَلَّلْتَهُمْ وَلَا مَنِّتَهُمْ وَلَا مَرَّتَهُمْ فَلَيُبْتَلَنَّ أَذَانَ الْأَنْعَامِ وَلَا مَرَّتَهُمْ فَلَيُعَذِّبَنَّهُ خَلْقَ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ يَتَّخِذِ الشَّيْطَانَ وَلِيًّا مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَقَدْ خَسِرَ خُسْرَانًا مُّبِينًا (٤: ١١٦-١١٩)

God will never forgive that partners be associated with Him and may forgive sins other than this for whomsoever He wishes. And He who associates partners with God has indeed strayed far. Whenever they call upon someone other than God, they call upon [female deities] and call upon Satan, the rebellious. Rather than to Him, they pray but to females: they pray but to a rebellious Satan. May God's curse be on him for he has said: "I shall lure a specific number of Your servants and lead them astray. I shall entice them into vain desires and lead them to slit the ears of cattle and I shall show them the way to tamper with God's creation." And he who chooses Satan rather than God for his protector will end up in open misfortune. (4:116-119)

This subject is discussed even more comprehensively in Sūrah Banī Isrā'īl (17:61-65). It might be of benefit to the reader to take a look at the explanation of these verses in this exegesis¹ so that all its implications become clear and it becomes evident that the greatest of Satan's effort is to entangle man in the noose of polytheism. The reason is that if man adopts this evil, he will strip himself of God's mercy and will never be forgiven. It is through this revenge that the jealousy and hatred Satan has for mankind is appeased.

In order to combat this evil scheme, arose the need to inform man here at the end of the Qur'ān of not only a comprehensive teaching of monotheism², but also of the best way to protect himself of the lures and machinations of Satan. It is by adopting this way that every servant of God can protect his treasure of monotheism from the onslaughts of Satan.

In order to explain this methodology, man is informed of two things:

1. See: Amīn Aḥsan Islāhī, *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*, vol. 3, 765-773.

2. Reference is to the preceding sūrah: Ikhlās which is a comprehensive statement of monotheism. (Translator)

one in this *sūrah* and one in the next *sūrah*.

In this *sūrah*, man is told that in order to shield himself from the onslaughts of Satan the only way is to seek refuge with God. There is no one except God who can protect him from the fraudulent and deceptive measures of Satan. If man is not vigilant enough all the time, there is a strong chance that he will be misled by him and then it would become difficult for him to come out of this situation.

In the next *sūrah*, man is informed of the attributes of God by means of which he can attain refuge with God by which he can shield himself from the lures and baits of Satan. It was only God Himself who could have informed man of these attributes and it is His great favour on man that He has done so. It is through His noble attributes that a correct relationship can be established between God and man and only God knows which of His attributes can act as a shield for man against the blitz launched by Satan. Man cannot know them of himself and a small error in this can spoil his efforts.

Another thing which is mentioned in the next *sūrah* is the extent to which Satan can lead man astray and the most effective of his methods in this regard. The purpose is to make man aware of the might of his enemy so that neither is he over-awed by his strength nor does he become indifferent to him. Moreover, he is fully informed of the paths from which Satan can attack and is also aware of the weapons God has given him to combat this enemy of his.

Text and Translation

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ الْفَلَقِ (١) مِنْ شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ (٢) وَمِنْ شَرِّ غَاسِقٍ إِذَا وَقَبَ (٣) وَمِنْ شَرِّ
التَّفَّاتَاتِ فِي الْعُقَدِ (٤) وَمِنْ شَرِّ حَاسِدٍ إِذَا حَسَدَ (٥)

Say: "With the Lord who brings forth I seek refuge from the evil of all that He has created and from the evil of the night as it spreads and from the evil of those who blow on knots and from the evil of the envious person when he envies." (112:1-5)

Explanation

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ الْفَلَقِ^(١)^٣

The word الْفَلَقِ (*al-falaq*) has been generally translated as “morning”; however, its real meaning is “to tear apart something”. Since morning appears after tearing apart the shroud of the night, the word *al-falaq* is also used for it. However, morning is not the only thing which appears after a process of tearing apart: everything emerges from something after splitting it apart. A plant appears from a seed after breaking it apart; vegetation germinates from the earth after ripping it apart; fountains and rivers sprout after the mountains are cleft apart. Similarly, off-springs come out from eggs after slitting them and all living beings emerge from wombs after emerging through their openings. In the light of this, what is the basis on which one can restrict the meaning of *al-falaq*. In this writer’s opinion, keeping in view its placement and context, it should be interpreted in its wider meaning. In the Arabic language it is also used thus. Just as the expression قَالَ فِي الْإِصْبَاحِ^٤ (٩٦:٦) is used in the Qur’ān; similarly the expression قَالَ فِي الْحَبِّ وَالنَّوَى^٥ (٩٥:٦) is also used in it. Similarly, about the heavens and earth, the Qur’ān states: كَانَتْ رَاقِعًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا (٣: ٢١). This means that both the heavens and the earth are closed and then are torn apart. The implication is that God showers down the rain after opening the heavens and grows plants from the earth after tearing it apart.

I have translated the expression رَبِّ الْفَلَقِ as “He who brings forth.” In my opinion, this translation is more comprehensive and meaningful. It is also in harmony with the subject which follows, as shall be presently explained.

مِنْ شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ^(٢)^٦

This is a mention of the objective for which refuge is sought with the Creator who brings forth. Man is urged to seek from the evil of the things created with the very Being who has created them and no one other than Him should be called upon for this purpose. Some other being can only give man refuge when that being is more powerful than the one who has created these things and it is absolutely illogical that any being be more powerful and prevailing than the creator of this universe. Hence seeking refuge with someone other than God from the evil of things created by God is absolute foolishness. Here it should be kept in consideration that all things have been created by God. No one is the

3. Say: I seek refuge with the Lord who brings forth

4. He who brings forth the dawn.

5. He who brings forth grain and the fruit-stone.

6. from the evil of all that He has created

Creator except Him.

Whatever God has created has been created for a positive purpose. However, whenever He wants, He can change them into evil. Rain is an absolute blessing for this world; however, if the Almighty wants, He can turn it into a punishment. Similarly, man himself because of his lack of awareness or ill-use turns something which is originally beneficial to him as something harmful. The correct way to protect oneself from the ill-effects of things is that a person should seek refuge with God alone. He should not start beseeching an object or a person thinking that that object or person per se has the power to effect a change, as has been the custom of polytheistic nations. Nor should a person start calling any one other than God as *ghawth* (the helper) or *qutub* (the pivot)⁷ thinking that they would save him from God's grasp. Only God can help a person from God's grasp. The various permissible measures a person adopts to save himself from calamities eg consulting a doctor in case of sickness are not against this principle on the condition that he thinks that the real doctor is only God Himself. Only He can cure a sickness. If He does not intend to cure a sickness, there is no one who in any way can cure the slightest of maladies.

It becomes evident from these details that only one utterance is enough to close many doors which lead to polytheism. It also roots out duality and the concept that good and evil have separate Gods and kingdoms. Polytheistic nations while thinking that each calamity per se can cause benefit or harm start beseeching it. The truth of the matter is that a calamity has no independent existence; it is actually a manifestation of the various creations of God which comes into being by God's leave and casts its effects by His directive and it is only His help which can be instrumental in shielding a person from it. Hence the real haven and sanctuary is God Almighty.

وَمِنْ شَرِّ غَاسِقٍ إِذَا وَقَبَ⁸

ghāsiq (ghāsiq) refers to night when it becomes dark once the glow of dusk disappears. وَقَبَ (*waqaba*) means the spreading of darkness. Lexicographers have written that *ghāsiq* also means "the moon". However, here the expression إِذَا وَقَبَ (when it spreads) clearly points to the fact that it means "the night". The reason is that as its darkness increases, it increases by enshrouding many evils in it.

This verse is a very good example of the fact that evil does not have an

7. These two terms are used by the proponents of mysticism to refer to certain saints and personalities they revere.

8. and from the evil of the night as it spreads

independent existence in this world so that one may have to regard good and evil to have two separate creators and both of these creators be beseeched. The truth of the matter, as pointed out above, is that evil is a by-product of the objects created by God. Therefore, to protect oneself from it, one does need to seek refuge in someone other than God; on the contrary, refuge must be sought with Him and only He should be beseeched and implored.

At various places in the Qur'ān, it is mentioned that for the sustenance of this world, just as the warmth of the day is necessary, the calm and cold of night is also necessary. In these verses, the harmony between conflicting elements in sustaining this world is presented as an argument for monotheism. Here, by urging man to seek refuge from the evil of the night, the message which is intended to be put across to him is that the night which provides comfort to man has an evil by-product: in it thieves, assassins, enemies, harmful creatures come out to harm him. It would be very wrong to conclude from the intervention of these unwanted visitors at night which co-exist with the comfort provided by it that the creator of the night is someone else and of the un-welcome things which appears in it to be someone else. Then the fact that both these creators are invoked for help would be as wrong. The correct and rational attitude would be to regard the creator of both as the same. It is He who has blessed man with the comfort of night and it is only He who can grant a person refuge from things which are harmful to him. In other words, just as the blessings of the night are a favour from God, the evil which it enshrouds is because of God's permission. Thus man must seek only His refuge in all circumstances.

Here, one must keep in consideration the fact we have referred to earlier that by not understanding this nature of the existence of evil, some naïve people have regarded evil to have an independent existence and then founded the concept of dualism by regarding good and evil to have separate creators. By giving a very sound example, the Qur'ān has clarified in this verse what the actual nature of evil is and who is the one who can give man refuge from it.

وَمِنْ شَرِّ النَّفَّاثَاتِ فِي الْعُقَدِ (٤)⁹

After urging man to seek refuge from evil which is material and tangible calamities, in this verse he is urged to seek refuge from evil which is spiritual and moral in nature.

The expression النَّفَّاثَاتِ فِي الْعُقَدِ means "those who blow on knots". Although the word النَّفَّاثَاتِ is in the feminine form, it does necessarily

9. and from the evil of those who blow on knots

imply women. According to linguistic principles of Arabic,¹⁰ it can imply evil spirits and evil souls, whether men or women and whether here they refer to those among the Jews and Sabeans or among the conjurers and soothsayers of Arabia.

Blowing on knots is the way adopted by charmers and people who give amulets. They chant spells in their minds and then blow on chords and threads while tying knots on it and believe that in this manner they can lure and control their subject. They then try to inflict whatever harm they want to on this subject. The adjective النَّفَّاثَاتِ (*al-naffāthāt*) is intended to portray a picture of their pretense. A similar portrayal is made at another place in the Qur'ān of the meditation of the soothsayers: يُلْقُونَ السَّمْعَ وَأَكْثُرُهُمْ كَاذِبُونَ (They eagerly listen and most of them are liars, (26:223)). In my opinion, the purpose of this portrayal is to point out its worthlessness.

As far as the question whether charms and spells do have effects is concerned, we have already given our opinion while commenting on the issue of Hārūt and Mārūt mentioned in Sūrah Baqarah (2:102).¹¹ In our opinion, a greater part of these spells is mere fraud and deception as is evident from the above quoted verse (26:223). And if at all they can have effects, the Qur'ān has clearly said that they can only cause any harm by God's permission: بِضَآرِّينَ بِهِ مِنْ أَحَدٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَمَا هُمْ (And the fact of the matter is that they can harm none with what they learnt except by God's permission, (2:102)). Now when they can cause harm only with the permission of God, there remains no need to look for someone other than God for seeking refuge with.

It is the practice of God to deal with people the way they deal with themselves: If a person fosters a strong relationship with God and his heart remains replete with His remembrance and if he protects himself from superstitious beliefs and always turns to God when he encounters hardships, then the Almighty does not allow Satan to take the better of him. If some accidental harm does come his way, he is able to save himself by diverting his attention to God.

On the other hand, if a person is superstitious and credulous and instead of relying on sense and reason relies on speculation and conjecture and if instead of deeply trusting God clings to doubts and scepticism, then such a person is often lured by devils among the jinn and men, who then escort him to all sorts of evil. The only way to protect

10. In Arabic, the words *al-arwāḥ* and *al-nufūs* are feminine and can be regarded as the suppressed nouns of the feminine adjective *al-naffāthāt*. The expressions thus would be: *al-arwāḥ al-naffāthāt* and *al-nufūs al-naffāthāt*. (Translator)

11. Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*, vol. 1, 238-244.

oneself from this evil, according to this *sūrah*, is to remain in the asylum of the Almighty. Whenever he feels that his heart is getting inclined to evil, he should immediately seek refuge with Him. The best way to do this is to recite these two last *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān.

وَمِنْ شَرِّ حَاسِدٍ إِذَا حَسَدَ¹²(٥)

Here, at the end, the Qur'ān has taught the believers a prayer to shield themselves from the envies of envious people. The envious are referred to here in general and no one specific is implied. The reason is that whoever the envious person maybe, when his envy crosses the limits, like the envy of Cain it subsides only after spilling the blood of Able. Hence one should keep seeking refuge from it. We have already explained in the introduction to this *sūrah* that it is Satan who envies man the most and is particularly envious of the belief of monotheism. We have already referred to the evidence regarding his intense determination to alienate people from this belief. The following verses may also be kept in consideration so that the emphasis in the words إِذَا حَسَدَ (when he envies) is fully understood:

قَالَ أَرَأَيْتَكَ هَذَا الَّذِي كَرَّمْتَ عَلَيَّ لَئِنْ أَخَّرْتَنِ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ لَأَحْتَنِكَنَّ ذُرِّيَّتَهُ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا قَالَ اذْهَبْ فَمَنْ تَبِعَكَ مِنْهُمْ فَإِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ جَزَاءُكُمْ جَزَاءً مَوْفُورًا وَاسْتَفْزِرْ مِنْهُمْ اسْتَطَعْتَ مِنْهُمْ بِصُوتِكَ وَأَجْلِبْ عَلَيْهِمْ بِخَيْلِكَ وَرَجِلِكَ وَشَارِكْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَوْلَادِ وَعِدْهُمْ وَمَا يَعِدُهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ إِلَّا غُرُورًا إِنَّ عِبَادِي لَيْسَ لَكَ عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطَانٌ وَكَفَى بِرَبِّكَ وَكِيلًا (١٧: ٦٢-٦٥)

Satan said: "So this is the one whom You have exalted above me. If You grant me respite till the Day of Judgement, I will wipe out all but a few of his descendants." The Almighty replied: "Go! Hell is your complete reward, and the complete reward of those that follow you. Incite with your voice whomever you are able to. Muster against them your battalions on horse and on foot. Be their partner in their riches and in their offspring. Make false promises with them and all of Satan's promises are mere deception. However, You will not be able to influence My true servants and sufficient is Your Lord for trust." (17:62-65)

Evident from this verse under discussion is the vigour, determination

12. and from the evil of the envious person when he envies

and resources with which Satan is equipped to divert mankind from the path of monotheism. This aggression on his part is pointed by the words: إِذَا حَسَدَ ie. when this envious being starts to show his envy with full frenzy.

This *sūrah* does not require any narrative to explain its occasion for revelation. However, some people have mentioned it with reference to an incident as per which the Prophet (sws), God forbid, once came under the influence of a magical spell of the Jews. As a result of this spell, he became sick and was taught the words of this *sūrah*. Later, he was cured of the ill-effects of this spell once he recited these *sūrahs*.

Although it is claimed that this magical spell did not in any way effect him in discharging his duties as a prophet, simultaneously it is also acknowledged with naivety that as a result of this spell the Prophet (sws) felt mentally and physically drained. At times, he would think that he had done a certain task whereas actually he had not. Similarly, it was acceded that he would think that he had gone near his wives whereas he would not have. At other times, he would even begin to have doubts about his sight: he would think that he had seen a thing, whereas he would not have in fact seen it. These people also claim that the Prophet (sws) did not remain in this state for a few hours or a few days – he was in it for six whole months. The question arises that if he, God forbid, really remained in this state of mental lapse for a period of six months, how can it be ruled out that he, God forbid, could have thought that he had offered a prayer whereas actually he had not or that he had dictated to his scribes the revelations brought to him by Gabriel or not or whether he had seen Gabriel or not? On what grounds can one rule out these possibilities? If someone says that we find no such information in Ḥadīth narratives, one can reply by saying that when have all details been recorded in them? On the other hand, what is more probable is that a person whose mental state was such, then such things would have emanated from him. It would be strange if they had not.

In the opinion of this writer, what is enough to reject this occasion of revelation is the fact it is against the established belief of infallibility about Prophets (*‘iṣmat-i anbiyā’*) mentioned by the Qur’ān. As per this belief, they cannot err in matters of receiving divine revelation the way it was sent to them and also cannot err in communicating it in its original form to their followers. The fact that prophets have been wounded or have lost some of their teeth or were even assassinated does in no way negate this belief. None of these happenings can hinder them in discharging their duties as prophets. No one can present these incidents as arguments to say that if a prophet can be inflicted with these things, then he can also come under the influence of a magical spell to the extent that he is unable to remember whether he had done something or not and

seen something or not. The Almighty has protected His prophets from such satanic effects and this protection is essential for the protection of the contents of the religion revealed to them. It is this protection which authenticates the words and deeds of prophets as part of religion. The whole of the Qur'ān bears witness to the fact that the Prophet (sws) received and communicated the religion revealed to him in a fool-proof manner and it is incumbent upon every Muslim to profess belief in this.

If we judge these Āḥadith on the principles of *rawāyah*, a major weakness in the chain of narrators can be noted. In order to inject fabrications in a narrative of the six canonical collections, concocted and weak narratives have been relied upon and the fabricated incident has been portrayed as an actual happening.¹³ Among the compilers of the six canonical collections, this narrative has only been recorded by Bukhārī, Muslim and Ibn Mājah. It is a *ḵabār-i wāḥid* up to the third step in its chain of narration.¹⁴ In one narrative of Bukhārī, Sufyān ibn 'Uyaynah admits that he has had heard it for the first time from Ibn Jurayj.¹⁵ In other words, this event came to general notice almost a hundred years after the Prophet's death. Before this, only a small number of people were aware of it. Everyone can understand that if the Prophet (sws) had really remained under the influence of a magical spell, then such an incident was so extra-ordinary that it should have become very famous in the first period and this narrative should have reached us as a *mutawātir* narrative.

None of the narratives reported in the canonical collections informs us about the length of the period for which the Prophet (sws) remained in this state. On the other hand, the words which are common to the narratives of all the three collections are: *حتى إذا كان ذات يوم أو ذات ليلة دعا رسول الله ثم دعا ثم دعا* (Till the time that when a day or a night had passed, the Prophet (sws) supplicated continuously).¹⁶ It is evident from these words that if something did influence his mind, it only lasted for some hours. Then he supplicated continuously to God and was cured of its effects. If this happened, then it was similar to how Moses (sws) had come to regard the ropes and staffs of the magicians as snakes and became worried temporarily. It is not unlikely that such things cannot

13. To comprehend this conclusion of the author would require a careful study of all the variants of the narrative. (*Translator*)

14. The first three narrators are 'Ā'ishah (rta), 'Urwah Ibn Zubayr and Hishām Ibn 'Urwah. (*Translator*)

15. Al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 5, 2175, (no. 5432).

16. Al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, 1913, (no. 3095); Ibid., vol. 5, 2172, (no. 5430); Ibid., vol. 5, 2347, (6028); Muslim, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, 1719, (no. 2189); Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, vol. 2, 1173, (no. 3545).

happen. Such incidents can even take place to test the prophets but are always transient so that they do not effect in any way the infallibility of the prophets.

One should also keep in mind the fact none of the *muḥaddithūn* of the canonical collections have mentioned this incident as the *shā'n-i nuzūl* (occasion of revelation) of these *sūrahs* nor has it been mentioned that the Prophet (sws) had untied the knots of a chord whilst reciting these *sūrahs*. In other words, it becomes evident that these *muḥaddithūn* never linked this incident to Sūrah Falaq. It is the later scholars who have linked the narratives which mention this incident to these last two *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān. Notwithstanding the fact that it is evident from this explanation of Sūrah Falaq and that of its succeeding *sūrah*, Sūrah Nās that the subject matter of these *sūrahs* rejects the fact that the revelation of these *sūrahs* be occasioned because of an unspecified magician casting a spell on the Prophet (sws).

With the grace of God, the explanation of this *sūrah* ends here. فالحمد
لله على إحسانه (so gratitude be to Him for this favour)

Lahore,
9th August, 1980 AD
26 Ramaḍān, 1400 AH
